

Remarks for Jay Manning
News conference on drought emergency
March 10, 2005

Thank you, Governor Gregoire.

I feel like I'm at the starting line of the Indianapolis 500 – and somebody just announced, "Gentlemen, start your engines!"

We have just started a race – a race to get out ahead of this drought and try to head off the worst of the effects.

The declaration I just signed allows three important changes to address the effects of the drought:

1. For the duration of the emergency, the Department of Ecology can authorize temporary transfers of water rights on an expedited basis.

That means people who have valid water rights can share them with those who need water.

That's important to remember, because moving water from less-critical uses to more-critical uses will be one of our key strategies for managing this drought.

2. The Department of Ecology will immediately tap into the Drought Emergency Account.

We will use this money to acquire water to prevent or ease crucial water shortages.

This means making sure our citizens have drinking water, helping our farmers bring their crops to harvest, and making sure fish have enough water to survive.

3. The emergency declaration also allows us to authorize emergency water permits for new water withdrawals.

For this to work, we'll need to make sure that no other water uses are harmed by the emergency wells.

When a new water use harms another, it is referred to as "impairment" – and we will be putting an impairment mitigation program in place to help users get access to emergency supplies to meet their essential water needs.

Our focus for the next few months will be on helping communities and farmers and streams get the water they need.

Let me be clear that I'm not promising that everyone will get all of the water they want.

In some cases, we'll be able to provide only enough water to get by – because that's the reality we face in a drought.

We can't manufacture water where it's not available, and we have an obligation to protect senior water rights and preserve a supply of water for fish and wildlife, especially our important salmon and steelhead runs.

We learned in the 2001 drought that hard times bring people together. It brings out a lot of creative ideas, and it leads to solutions that wouldn't be possible at any other time.

I expect that will be the case again this year, and the Department of Ecology is committed to helping in any way we can.

Let me describe several specific actions we have already taken, or will take in the near future.

- We are already working to maintain drinking water supplies for the town of Roslyn and other domestic users in the Yakima Basin.
- Today, we will ask the judge who oversees water rights in the Yakima Basin to hold weekly meetings to review emergency water applications – instead of the current every-other-week schedule.
- We have re-activated our drought Web site, which has lots of information for all levels of interest.
- We will be activating our toll-free drought hotline system so people can obtain up-to-date information about whether it's ok to use water.
- We will be issuing weekly news releases with the latest drought information, including the latest actions taken by state government to respond to the drought.
- And at the governor's request, we will hold a number of meetings around the state to give water users, tribes, community leaders and interested citizens an opportunity to talk to us about the drought and keep the lines of communication open during this difficult situation.

This is a shared emergency, and we will need to have a shared response.

Finally, I want to talk for a moment about the role other state agencies will play, so you get a sense of the broad attention this issue is getting:

- The ***Department of Fish & Wildlife*** is monitoring stream conditions and will help guide our efforts to purchase water to maintain stream flows
- The ***Department of Natural Resources, the State Fire Marshall, and Emergency Management Department*** are working together with local and federal fire fighters to prepare to fight forest fires.
- The ***Department of Health*** is monitoring drinking-water supplies and will coordinate with Ecology if there are shortages that need to be addressed.
- The ***Department of Agriculture*** and the ***Conservation Commission*** will coordinate our cooperative efforts with the agricultural community on water-supply solutions.

The Department of Agriculture also will coordinate with the federal Farm Service Agency, which provides crucial information about crop losses and other damage that could be used in seeking federal disaster assistance.

- The ***Employment Security Department*** is tracking unemployment related to the drought. If necessary, they can provide a streamlined unemployment application process.
- And the ***Community, Trade & Economic Development*** will monitor overall economic effects, and they may have some grant and loan programs that communities could apply for.

Our drought response will be active, dynamic and flexible, firmly focused on anticipating what might happen – but able to adapt to what actually occurs.

Thank you.